

CLOTHES

Intellect is to emotion as our clothes are to our bodies; we could not very well have civilized life without clothes, but we would be in a poor way if we had only clothes without bodies. Alfred North Whitehead

***Nothing wears clothes, but Man; nothing doeth need,
But he to wear them. George Herbert***

***Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes.
Henry David Thoreau***

Despite having published many excellent biochemistry research articles dealing with rather esoteric issues in a variety of learned scientific journals, Dr. John Smith remained a virtual unknown. Perhaps it was because he was as non-distinctive as his name. He was extremely shy. His physical appearance conformed to that of the average male. His features were featureless. His voice was monotonously monotone. When he entered a crowded room or one with a few persons, he was never noticed, even by those who knew him. When he gave a lecture or made a presentation at a scientific conference the hall was nearly always empty. His breakthroughs were often accredited to others. He was too timid to fight back. He was a social pariah, never receiving an invitation to just about anything. In many ways he was a clone of everyman. It is impossible to distinguish a particular clone from the very many with similar origins.

Dr. Smith was not unaware of his shortcomings. He despaired of them. He sought help. Time and again his psychiatrist would forget his appointments or make some lame excuse to cancel. He sought counseling wherever he could get some. The many charlatans in the field were quite happy to take his money but had no solutions for his problem. He contemplated suicide to get some sort of attention and recognition but wondered if anyone would notice his demise. He became quite depressed and retreated into his work and himself and only communicated with others when it was absolutely necessary. Despite all these travails he continued his research and was always published. He was highly regarded by the very few in his esoteric field. None of them knew him personally. Unfortunately he was never given the accolades he merited.

Then an odd incident occurred. He was in the process of getting dressed. To say the least his wardrobe was rather scant. Clothes had never held any interest for him. As he was putting on a shirt, he accidentally tore it. He looked for another but could not find one that was either clean or presentable. Then like a bolt out of the blue it came to him. What if he started wearing clothes that were gaudy and flashy, of high quality and accompanied with matching tie pins, bracelets, rings and any other appropriate pieces of ornate and expensive jewelry? Since he had always been very frugal, money was no problem. He realized that he needed some assistance in choosing these accoutrements. He sought and found the top men's stylist, who immediately realized that he had close to an impossible task. The old adage that, 'Clothes make the man' turned out to be inoperative in the case of Dr. Smith. Nothing that the expert tried was able to overcome Dr. Smith's mundane and dreary public image.

Yet Dr. Smith appeared to have taken a new lease on life. He was not discouraged. He realized that despite his efforts he remained the visible, invisible man. What if he could make himself truly invisible? Wouldn't that create a public stir and thus would he not get

the public acclaim he felt he merited? After all he was one of the world's leading biochemists, ergo if anyone could manage this task it might very well be him.

Much to his surprise and perhaps to the chagrin of future generations and to history, he succeeded. Exactly how this was accomplished remains a mystery. It is known that somehow he was able to alter human DNA, rendering each cell in the human body transparent to visible light and to the near ultraviolet and infrared. Conjecture has it that he used either a combination of physical and chemical means or that he developed a virus that accomplished this desired result. The latter is usually considered to be the case, since invisibility spread quickly throughout humanity.

He first tried his method on himself and learned that it was dose dependant. He became invisible for only a few minutes. Increasing the dose increased the length of time that he remained invisible. Then he demonstrated his method on himself at a scientific conference. He became an instant celebrity. People clamored to have him make them invisible. He not only became famous but also immensely rich. In the immediate no one realized that while altering a person's DNA worked, the invisibility was temporary. However, it was not the case for their offspring. They remained permanently invisible. Historically, it did not take too long before everyone had become invisible. All this occurred about one thousand years ago. In some quarters Dr. Smith is viewed as a Saint and in others he is reviled.

One can only imagine the turmoil all this caused. It took about a century to start sorting out what had to be done and another two centuries for all societies to permanently come to grips with this radical transformation. As can be well imagined, there were many drastic changes in the technological, biomedical, political, social, psychosocial, police/judicial and cultural arenas. Sexual physical attractiveness was replaced by auditory erotic stimuli.

Perhaps the most overt manifestation of a radical change of mores was the role of clothes. Historically they had two functions, namely, to protect the human body from the elements and to supposedly enhance one's appearance. While continuing to serve those functions, they also became a means of identification. It became mandatory for everyone to be garbed with an ID number prominently displayed and to have every part of the anatomy covered. The reason for the latter was, as one can well imagine, how disconcerting it would be to have people sashaying around with an invisible head, midriff, low neckline or any other overt part of the anatomy. The punishment was quite severe for the transgression of promenading in public without clothes. -*Shades of Victorian Times*-

It did not take long before the textile and clothing industries became extremely profitable. This was because the freedom to be clad as outlandishly as possible had become de rigueur. Initially, the demand for clothes and textiles far exceeded the supply. Regulations were then enacted obliging the industry to meet the demand, which they did. Economies of scale reduced the price, making textiles affordable to all. Everyone tried to outdo everyone else with costumes, which they claimed had artistic merit despite their bizarre and frequent pornographic character.

Further, this anarchistic approach to clothing was quickly transmitted into the other arts such as music, literature, sculpture, painting and theatre. While some of the effects were without any artistic merit, others were so startling that, indeed, they may have been

heralding totally new legitimate art forms. After all, a radically different outlook on just about everything was bound to occur in a world of invisible people. Sounds and colors had to become more vivid than they had ever been. We can only hope that the unaesthetic will not endure and the truly beautiful in this new world will prosper.

Despite the outward appearance of chaos, all the world's nations became a global village in which certain norms became international, leading to a world with many positive attributes. Invisibility caused discrimination to disappear against visible minorities, the female sex, homosexuals, the physically unattractive, and the aged. The old forms of prejudice and bigotry also went by the wayside. Invisibility wrought a measure of equality that had been the dream of many but never before achieved. This, in turn, led to true political and economic equality. We now inhabit a world that is as close to a Utopian aspiration as is probably possible, given some of the negative aspects of the human condition.

We can only hope that this change in our DNA has more benefits in store for us. However it is imperative that we appreciate that clothing, a metaphor for appearance, is nothing more than an illusory mask and that our reality is our invisibility. Unfortunately we tend to put more store on the former than on the latter, more on what we believe than on what we know.

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